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Three Measures of Meal



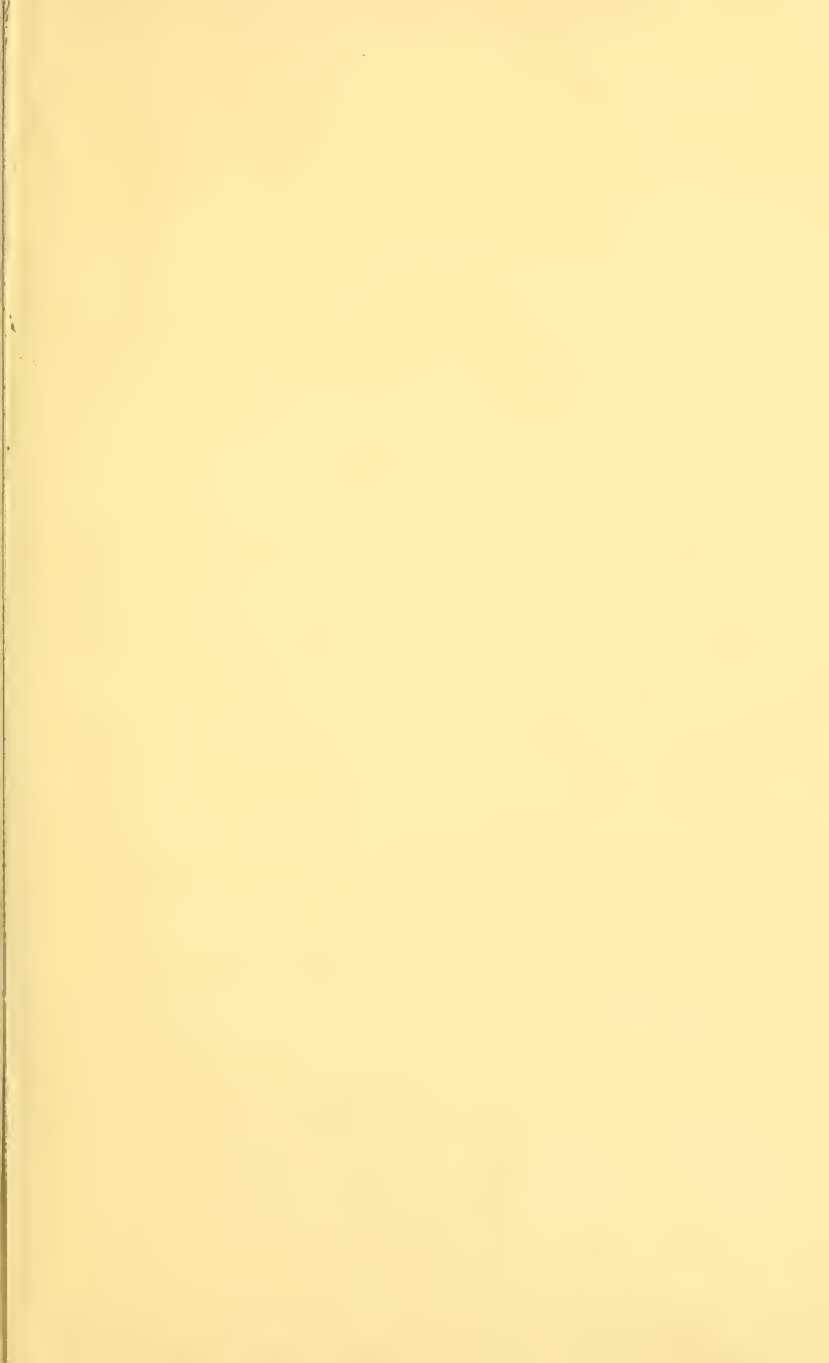


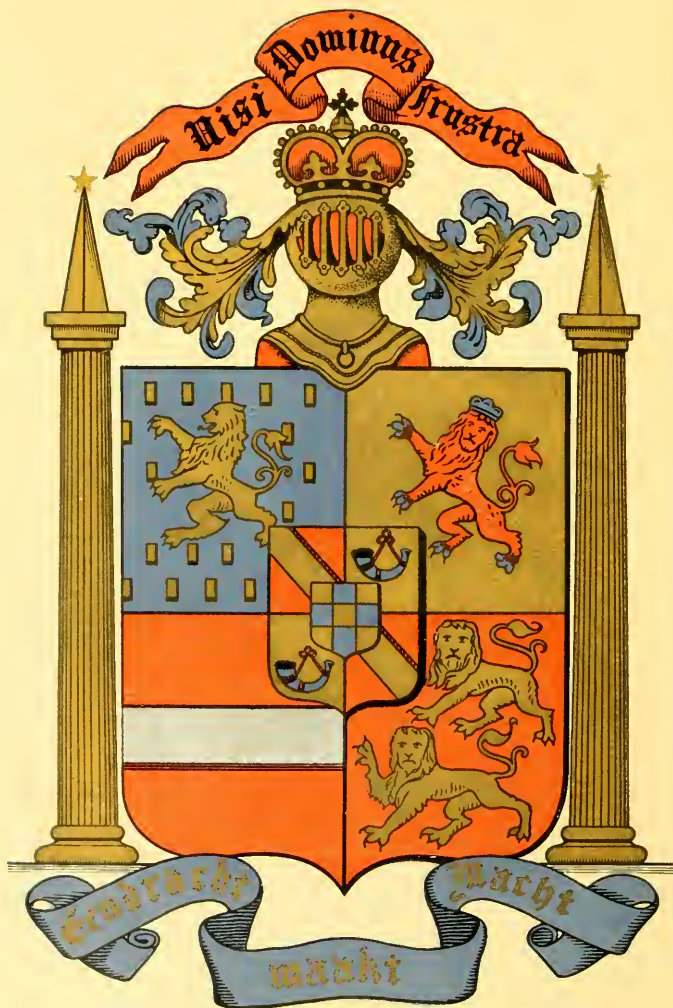
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COAT OF ARMS
OF THE REFORMED DUTCH CHURCH

Three Measures of Meal

By
Willis Bruce Dowd



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Preface

IN the summer of 1909, as in previous summers for many years, I made of a country club in the city of New York (for one finds the country in the city now-a-days) my habitation; a golf course and the waters of Gravesend Bay my playgrounds, and a tall gray horse in a fancy road-wagon my means of going from one to the other and to the trolley car, or boat, on my way to the borough of Manhattan in the mornings. It was not at all a bad way of spending the summer.

One thing I resolved not to do, and that was, to continue on Sunday the

amusements which I had indulged in during the week. Instead, it occurred to me that it would be much more profitable and agreeable to take a day out of each seven in which to visit the churches in the neighborhood, with the view, among other things, of discovering what leavening power they had had in the community. The investigation proved most interesting; and the result, in part, is disclosed in this little booklet. A trip to Richmond that summer had given me an opportunity to make inquiries into the history of Old St. John's, and therefore I premise the sketch of that edifice,—an account of its influence, its extraneous influence, one might say,—to the chapter on the Reformed Dutch Churches of New Utrecht and Gravesend on Long Island.

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At the end of the season I was short several holes on the golf-course, but my game did not fall off (could it have done so!). While I had missed many opportunities to slice a ball or be beaten by my opponent, things with which I was already quite familiar, I was the richer by many hours of meditation, investigation and quiet contact with agreeable people while gathering the material for this little booklet.

I am sure that the days off were profitably spent, and if anyone doubts it let him go and do likewise.

WILLIS BRUCE DOWD.

New York, March 10, 1910.



OLD ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH, RICHMOND, VA.

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I.

WHEN the writer of this humble narration was in Richmond, Virginia, in the Spring of 1909, he took occasion to visit and scrutinize Old St. John's Episcopal Church and the historic cemetery of which it is the centre. The most remarkable thing about the church is that it contains the pew from which Patrick Henry delivered his celebrated speech, "Give me liberty, or give me death!" The pew is plainly marked, and the casual visitor is mutely invited to drop a contribution of some sort into the charity box, which is conspicuously placed in one end of it.

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It seems strange to us of more modern times that the Colonial Assembly of Virginia should have been sitting in that churchly edifice; but we find, on looking into history, that the first General Assembly, the earliest legislative body in America, met in the church at Jamestown July 30, 1619. They sat with their hats on, after the manner of the English Commons; and from that time forth to the Revolutionary period the Colonial Assemblies were accustomed to meet in churches, because they were the most convenient places.

It is an interesting historical fact, incidental to the record of the speech of Patrick Henry, that the silence which followed his peroration was broken by Colonel Edward Carrington, who stood not far from the speaker, whose emotion

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found expression in the words, "Right here I wish to be buried!" The interment of his body in the cemetery in the year 1810 was a fulfilment of his wish.

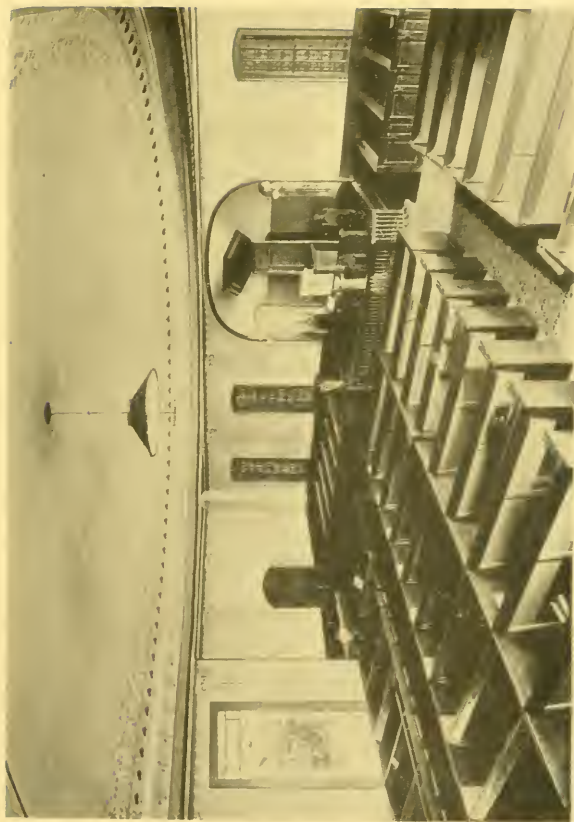
But Old St. John's has another claim upon our attention, and that is, that within its parish John Rolfe and Pocahontas lived for some time after their marriage at Jamestown. The Reverend Alexander Whittaker, who had been the first minister of St. John's, performed the ceremony, about the year 1613-1614—the exact date of their wedding not known. Certainly, when we consider that two such events transpired within the circle of influence of Old St. John's, we are obliged to take off our hats to it as a place of more than ordinary historic and romantic interest.

Fortunately, modernism has not laid

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its hands upon this old edifice. In it we behold the high pulpit and sounding-board and see the same pews that were there when the patriot fathers met to consider what they could do to throw off the British yoke.

Moreover, one finds history, philosophy and humor in varying phases of development in the cemetery which lies about Old St. John's. It is doubtful whether, in all the realm of the United States, there is another place equal to it for the variety of inscriptions on the monuments and headstones marking the last resting places of its parishioners. Here let us quote a few of these in proof of this assertion. We find first an inscription for a loving wife who died in the year 1840, at the age of 40 years:—



INTERIOR OF ST. JOHN'S
SHOWING PEW IN WHICH PATRICK HENRY MADE HIS IMMORTAL SPEECH

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“She done her duty on earth as a wife
& a mother and gave evidence
here on earth by her good
conduct of her reception
in heaven.”

An epitaph on the gravestone of a woman who died in 1814, “in the 18th year of her age,” reads as follows:—

“ . . . She left
a husband with an infant
10 weeks old to mourn her loss,
words are wanting to say what.
What a wife and mother should be
she was that.”

Now comes the turn of a widow, who laments the death of her husband, who died in the month of May, 1809, at the age of 41 years:—

“A widow who will long his life deplore
Her kind Husband now no more.”

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Very conspicuous and mournful is this admonition on the tombstone of a married woman who died at the age of 18 years, 7 months and 23 days:—

“Stop, my friends, as you pass by,
As you are now, so once was I;
As I am now soon you must be,
Prepare yourselves to follow me.”

It is alleged that a wag, on reading this inscription, wrote out and pasted over it some doggerel to the effect that he was willing to repent, but could not agree to follow the deceased until he knew which way she went!

It is very apparent, on reading these inscriptions, that the older parishioners knew nothing about Christian Science, because they seem to have suffered

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much pain, and they complain of doctors' services which were unavailing. And they undoubtedly died in the belief that there was no escape from physical suffering this side the grave. So runs the story on the shaft over the resting place of a native of Tipperary, his wife and son, who went the way of all flesh the first half of the last century:—

“Affliction sore long time I bore,
Physicians skill was vain,
Till God pleased that death should seize
And ease me of my pain.”

And surely there was evidence that death was regarded as a blessing to the sorely afflicted in this outpouring of sorrow and solace from a young husband over the demise of his wife:—

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“This languishing head is at rest
Its thinking and aching are o'er
This quiet immovable breast
Is heaved by affliction no more
This heart is no longer the seat
Of trouble and torturing pain
It ceases to flutter and beat
It never shall flutter again.”

Not all of the inscriptions, or even most of them, show lack of literary skill, but it was undoubtedly considered good taste in Virginia in former years to inscribe original verses over the graves of the deceased. Some of the inscriptions in prose and poetry pay high tribute to the dead, and bespeak the noble mind of friend or loved one who attempted to make a lasting tribute of respect on the graven stone. Here, for instance, is

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a quatrain marking the resting place of "John Lester, merchant of the city of Richmond," who died in the year 1804:—

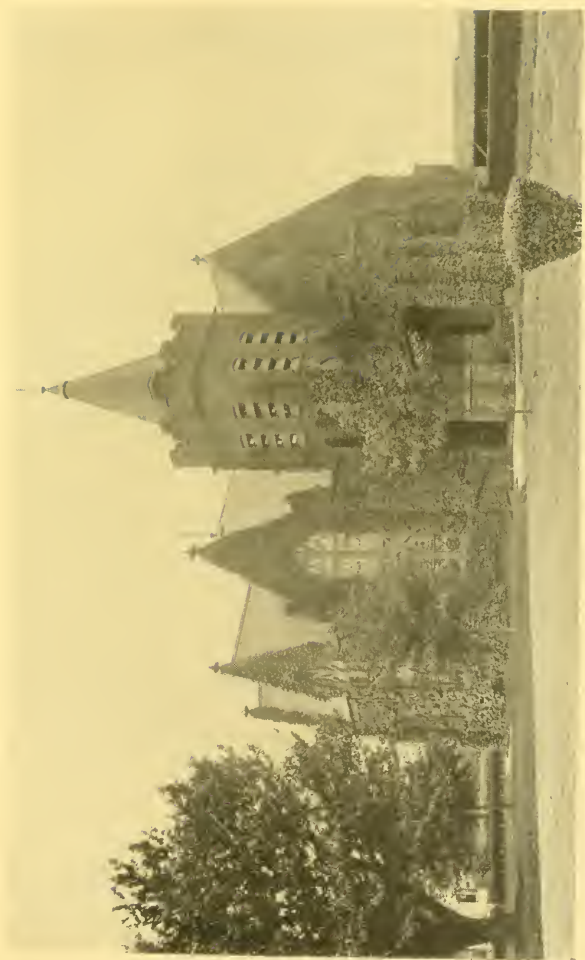
"No pampered verse or sculptur'd stone
Shall vaunt how lineage ran;
Write this upon the heart alone
Here lies an Honest Man."

And we may very well conclude our quotations and withdraw from the sacred precincts of Old St. John's, after looking at this inscription on the monument of a good spinster, who, after a life of much labor, died in the 53d year of her age in the year 1849:—

"By the death of her only sister early in life she was left in charge of five motherless children, to whose education for time and eternity all her energies of mind and body under God were con-

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secreted, for her they will ever cherish the warmest affection and the most lively gratitude.”



REFORMED DUTCH CHURCH, GRAVESEND

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II.

It is a peculiar thing how the curiosity of the traveller takes hold of an object, investigates it, and finds within it something distinctively responsive to his nature. Does one love history and romance, and is one inclined to dig through brick and mortar for the beauty and glory of the bygone time? If so, old St. John's is a good starting point, but there are other places of interest. Virginia is rich in stories of the Indians and the English, but Long Island has a peculiar flavor of the Dutch also.

Now Gravesend Bay is the first place of refuge around the end of Coney Island for vessels coming to our shores across

the Atlantic. Hence, we may naturally expect to find one of the oldest settlements in New York on its shores. Accordingly, we find Gravesend, which is at once an ancient and a quaintly beautiful place.

There is a dwelling in this old village (now absorbed, of course, into the great city of New York) which is about 250 years old, and it is thoroughly Dutch in architecture and appointments. It is said to be the oldest house on Long Island, and perhaps it is the oldest dwelling place in the city of New York. It is still occupied. An immense tree in front of it bears witness to its dignified age, and the garden vines and flowers which surround it have a tendency to give it a beauty and a perfume most unusual in the midst of modern brick and mortar.

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Not that the old village of Gravesend itself has been rebuilt, for it has not; but the encroachments of the contractor with his row of houses, and the municipality with its paved streets and sidewalks are not far to find; and one shudders to think what the little Dutch town of years ago will look like a few years hence when another subway or so is constructed between Manhattan Island and the gay resorts on Gravesend Bay.

One of the most beautiful church structures in the United States is to be found at Gravesend. The present building is entirely modern, having been erected in 1893-94. But its origin goes back two centuries and a half,—to the year 1655 to be exact,—when Dominie Johannes Polhemus began preaching in Breuckelen, Gravesend, and other places

on Long Island. It is a curious circumstance that while the English were overcoming the Dutch in all other parts of New Amsterdam, the Dutch were overcoming the English,—ecclesiastically at least,—in the town of Gravesend; for the town of Gravesend was settled under a patent granted to Lady Deborah Moody and others in the year 1645. It gave them full “power to erect a town and fortifications, and to have and enjoy the free liberty of conscience according to the manners and customs of Holland, without molestation or disturbance from any magistrate or magistrates, or any other ecclesiastical minister that might pretend jurisdiction over them; and the liberty to constitute themselves a body politic as freemen of the province and town of Gravesend.”



LADY DEBORAH MOODY HOUSE
PROBABLY OLDEST RESIDENCE ON LONG ISLAND. BUILT ABOUT THE YEAR 1650

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Lady Deborah Moody, who was an Englishwoman, had resided for some years at Salem, Massachusetts, but, becoming a convert to the views of Roger Williams, she gave expression to her dissent from the views of the Congregational Church concerning infant baptism, and thereupon was excommunicated,—which accounts for her removal, for conscience' sake, into New Amsterdam, and her procurement of the patent for the town of Gravesend.

We next find her associated with the Quakers, who established the first religious body in Gravesend, about the year 1645; and she continued active with them, “honored and beloved by all who knew her,” until 1659 when she died. The Quaker and English influence gradually diminished in the settlement

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and ultimately assumed a negligible phase. But the Dutch Church which began with Dominie Polhemus held on and has continually increased in wealth and influence from year to year.

By what process that first small organization maintained itself and grew in all these years it is not profitable here to inquire. But certain it is that the Dutch names and the Dutch traditions still adhere to this church and one can scarcely believe, in looking over the congregation, that he is in the midst of people who share the manners, the dress and the thoughts of the typical New Yorker of the twentieth century. Indeed, there is a vast difference, but the difference is easily in favor of the descendants of the people who established this church 250 years ago, and still follow



RESIDENCE AT GRAVESEND BAY, ERECTED ABOUT THE YEAR 1800

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in the footsteps of their fathers in the simplicity of their religion and manners.

Many of the old buildings in the neighborhood of the church preserve the ancient architecture. They are extremely beautiful in the summer season, as most of them are surrounded with a profusion of trees, shrubs, and flowers. It is a wonder that the average New Yorker thinks so much about the Gravesend race-track, and so little about the picturesque, delightful old village of Gravesend. Here the tired New Yorker, wearied of stocks and bonds, or surfeited with golf, tennis and automobiling, may forget the toil and moil of the modern world, and go back by an easy mental process into the calm and wholesomeness of the Dutch period. Here the student and the sage, baffled by the endless conflicts of

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theologians and scientists—real and so-called—over the truth and the true life, may go to refresh himself at a fountain whose waters, from its foundation, have been free, and in a place whose origin and history speak eloquently of liberty of thought and worship.

III.

MANY of us do often repine and lament the emptiness of existence when, if we only knew it, there are pleasures near at hand. The trouble with most people is that, having eyes, they see not, and having ears, they hear not. We have outgrown our monkey habits to a very great extent, and, unfortunately, most of us have dropped the curiosity which characterizes the monkey and causes him to look in and see what is going on. We fall into a dull routine of life, and complain of the routine; but the trouble is in ourselves,—we will not go around the block to see what has developed overnight in the next street.

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There used to be, not far from Gravesend, another Dutch village, which was called New Utrecht. Very little is left to mark the place of its existence now, but one finds a station on one branch of the Brooklyn elevated road on the way to Bath Beach and Coney Island, which is called Van Pelt Manor, and that is where we get off to find what is left of New Utrecht.

The most conspicuous thing about it is the Reformed Dutch Church, which is hard by the station. It is very difficult for the New Yorker of today to imagine the existence of such a church as the Dutch had in this place more than two hundred years ago. If one will look at the accompanying pictures, showing the first and last edifices of this congregation, the imagination will have a difficult



REFORMED DUTCH CHURCH, NEW UTRECHT. ERECTED 1828-9

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struggle to get back through the mist of years and see what the social and civic conditions were in that long gone time.

It is interesting to note that many of the names familiar in the business and social life of New York today are found among the first parishioners of this New Utrecht church. For instance: Hegeman, Van Pelt, Van Nostrand, Van Brunt, Van Dyck, Corteljau, Terhune, Vandeventer, and Van Voorhees. The descendants of the founders have been absorbed in the multiform life of the great metropolis, and their names are written in the streets and places of public interest in New York. It is fortunate that their chosen place of worship, which is the only thing of conspicuous identity with their origin and growth as a separate factor in the community, is preserved

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in a very substantial and beautiful environment. The Reformed Dutch Church of New Utrecht is easily one of the most attractive and satisfying church edifices and properties in the great city of New York.

The small building which is shown in one of our pictures¹ was erected in 1700, but that was twenty-three years after the organization of the church. In speaking of it at the bi-centennial celebration on October 18, 1877, the Rev. David S. Sutphen, the pastor, in his memorial address, said:—

It was a stone structure of octagonal form, with a roof running up to a point, surmounted by a belfry. At first it was without pews, the worshippers occupying chairs. Afterward pews were erected in it. The pulpit was very high,

¹ See title-page.

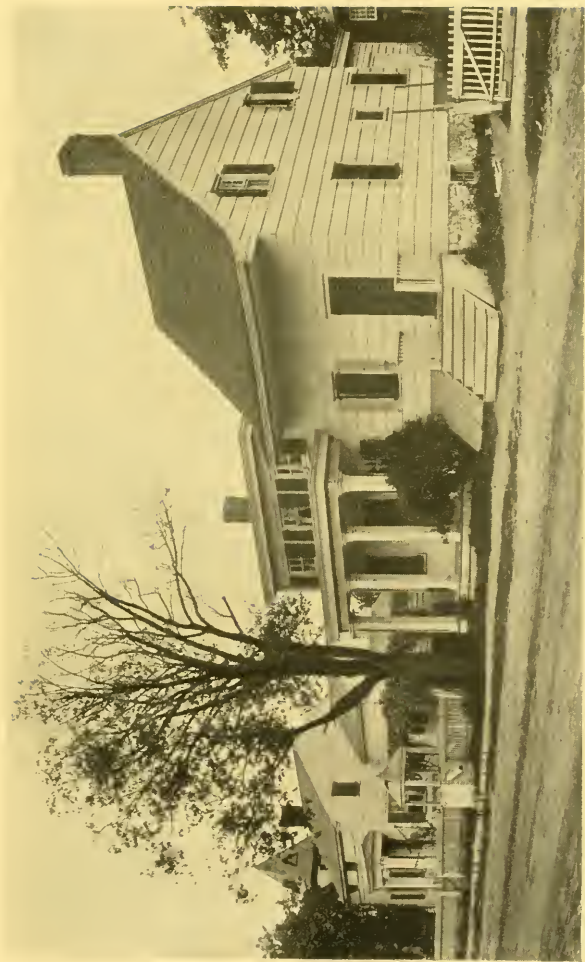
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with about room enough in it for the preacher—in shape very much like a tumbler. Access to it was gained by a winding staircase on one side. The building stood in the old graveyard at the other end of the village, and remained until the year 1828, a period of one hundred and twenty-eight years. During all this time it was used for public worship, except a few years during the struggle for independence. During the Revolutionary War it was occupied by the British. Peculiar in construction and prominent in position, its removal was deeply regretted. It is said that sea-captains used it as a mark by which to steer their vessels into the harbor; and I doubt not many a landsman found it to be the place where he was directed in the way to the heavenly home.

The same speaker on the same occasion adverted to some of the ancient customs of the church:—

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In the old church the number of the first psalm was set with movable figures suspended at the sides of the pulpit. These the clerk properly arranged before service, so that everyone might readily prepare to sing. It was also the clerk's duty to have an hour-glass properly placed near the minister at the commencement of the sermon, and as the last grains of sand left the upper for the lower cavity, it was a reminder that the time had arrived for the conclusion. Some preachers, however, quietly allowed the sand to run out, and then informed their audience that, as they had sat so patiently through the one, they would proceed with a second. The collections during the service were taken in velvet bags attached to the end of long poles, with a small alarm bell fastened to the end. The best explanation I have heard of the use of the latter is that it indicated when



STREET SCENE IN GRAVESEND
SHOWING HOUSES ERECTED IN THE EARLY PART OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

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contributions were made. When a coin was given the bell rang; if it passed through a pew silently it showed that nothing had been contributed by the persons in that pew. It required considerable dexterity to handle them well, to avoid pillars and bonnets. Previous to 1802 there were no stoves in the churches. The ladies were accustomed to bring their foot-stoves, and to replenish them at a house near by. . . . In those days, when the ladies went out to spend the day, or to make an afternoon visit at the parsonage, they carried their spinning wheels and flax with them. Among the old social customs was to furnish the persons invited to funerals with tobacco, pipes and liquor, . . . a custom which was sadly abused. This was happily abandoned about forty years ago. Funeral sermons do not appear to have been usual in our church in olden times.

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One humorous bit of history in connection with the church at New Utrecht will be appreciated by the discriminating reader. Thompson, in his "History of Long Island," says that one of the clergy was accused of having married himself while he had another wife living. "Then (to quote the Reverend Mr. Sutphen) the accused alleged, by way of excuse, that his first wife had eloped with no just cause; and, being minded to take another, he considered he had as good a right to execute the ceremony for himself as for any other person. This reasoning failed to satisfy the court, who declared the marriage void and fined the delinquent 200 guilden or 40 beaver skins, and also 40 guilden more for his insolence and impertinence to the court." It is safe to say that a preacher of that

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kind, if one could be found in these days, would never talk to empty benches.

When the present church building at New Utrecht was erected in the year 1828-29, the stones of that ancient edifice were utilized as far as they would go in its construction. If it is true, therefore, as the theosophists assert, that inanimate objects carry the impression of spirits which come in contact with them through mortal agency, one who worships in this more modern building must have a lively sense of association with men of peace and men of war,—Dutchmen, Englishmen and Indians,—back to the very foundation of the civilization of this country.

It is well to note also that the people of New Utrecht have a body of people known as the "New Utrecht Liberty

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Pole Association.” There is a road running near the church, which is known as the “King’s High-way;” and it is alleged on good authority that when George Washington, as first President of the Republic, rode that way, he looked upon the original flag-pole erected by the parishioners of this Dutch Reformed Church after the evacuation of the British in 1783. He went down in a coach-and-four to dine with his friend William Barre, who lived nearby. The pole has been reset three times,—in 1834, 1867 and 1899, the last time being May 10, 1899, and it now occupies the foremost place in the foreground of the church property. It is the last of its kind on Long Island. The association contains a large membership who contribute one dollar each a year for the

New Utrecht Liberty Pole

18th Ave., 8th and 9th Streets.

BROOKLYN, N. Y.

Original Pole erected 1782.



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preservation of the flag pole and the flag, the printing and distribution of literature, and other incidental purposes.

It must be manifest to the passerby, therefore, that the people of this congregation believe in more than religion; they are patriots and love the country and all that is best therein.

It will be of interest, no doubt, to many persons not familiar with the history of the Dutch Reformed Church, to know that its coat-of-arms is made up of the shield and crest of the Prince of Orange, with side ornaments giving them a clerical setting, and with scrolls and mottoes, above and beneath, which indicate the cardinal points of their doctrine. On the motto above is, "*Nisi Dominus Frustra,*" which, being liberally interpreted, means, "Without God all

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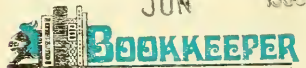
is vain;" and on the motto below are the Dutch words, "*Eendracht maakt Macht*," which signifies our familiar phrase, "In union there is strength."

Behold the work of the churches!

Now, "the kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till the whole was leavened," the truth of which may be found in this story of three churches.

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